

On High Alert: Emergency Preparedness for You and Your Pets

(Courtesy of the Humane Society of the United States)



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London's not burning, but the city *is* nervous. Two recent attacks on London's Underground train system and its buses have unnerved commuters there, and have caused the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to put the American mass-transit system on Orange Alert, or high alert.

The bombings have again put people on edge, wondering whether they should be worried about similar attacks on their ride to work, or even in their own residence. It's a confusing time, and that confusion can be compounded by unclear and even impractical information.

During these stressful times, the last thing you may think about is your pet. But that would be a mistake. When emergencies strike, whether a **hurricane** or a terrorism attack, you need to plan for *both* you and your animals. Those who don't may pay a price far higher than expected.

Emergency preparedness for terrorism is very much the same as it is for natural disasters and other, more familiar emergencies. If it's not safe for you, it's not safe for your pets.

There are two basic responses to an emergency: "sheltering in place" at home or at your office—wherever you are when the emergency happens—or evacuation. With terrorist attacks, most people will probably have to deal with sheltering in place.

Remember these **simple tips**:

1. Listen to the local emergency radio station in your area and comply with recommendations and orders from your local government. They are the authority in your area. Ask your police or fire department which station is the official emergency outlet.
2. Have an emergency kit for your family and your pets. A basic guideline: If you need something, chances are that your pet needs something similar. For instance:
 - Food, water, and medications for three days—more if your local authorities suggest it.
 - Identification, medical and veterinary records, and your important papers.
 - Extra cash—ATMs might not work.
 - A full tank of gas in your car—fill it up frequently.
 - A battery-operated radio, a flashlight, and extra batteries to fit them.

- Identification (with your contact information) attached to your pet and a means of confining and controlling your pets: a carrier, leash, etc.
- Some extra clothing suitable to the season, and perhaps a favorite blanket (which is especially comforting to pets).
- A container to help carry these supplies.

Make sure everyone knows the location of your emergency kit. For more information on what should be in your pet emergency kit, see our page on [Disaster Preparedness for Pets](#).

3. Be prepared at your office, too. Have a similar emergency kit for yourself at your office or school and in your car. Include food, water, extra clothing, and perhaps a blanket, a radio, a flashlight, and extra batteries.
4. Create a plan in case you are not at home during an emergency, to ensure that someone takes care of your pets, even evacuating them if necessary. The plan would include these elements:

- Give a trusted neighbor your house key and instructions, as well as your daytime (work or school) contact information.
- Make sure the neighbor is familiar with your pet, and knows the location of your pet emergency kit.
- Make sure the neighbor listens to your local emergency station, and puts your shelter-in-place or pet evacuation plan into action.
- Have a plan to communicate with your neighbor after the event. You will want to arrange a meeting place in a safe area, so you can be reunited with your pet.

Scenario: Sheltering in Place

If your local authorities recommend sheltering in place, close your windows and doors and stay inside. Follow these tips:

- Bring your pets indoors as soon as local authorities say there is an imminent problem. Keep pets under your direct control; if you have to evacuate, you will not have to spend time trying to find them.
- If you have a room you can designate as a "safe room," put your emergency supplies in that room in advance, including your pet's crate and supplies. Basements or inside rooms are preferred.
- If there is an open fireplace, vent, pet door, or similar opening in the house, close it off with plastic sheeting and strong tape.
- Have plenty of plastic bags and newspapers (puppy training pads are also useful for this), as well as containers and cleaning supplies, to help deal with pet waste.
- Listen to the radio periodically, and don't come out until you know it's safe.

The catch phrase for sheltering in place is: **Go In, Stay In, Tune In.**

Scenario: Evacuation

If your local government orders an evacuation, follow these tips:

- Learn your official evacuation routes from your local authorities and media.
- Be ready to take your family, your pets, and your emergency kit with you.
- Know in advance where you will go.
- Make sure your pets will be welcome, whether at a motel or a friend or relative's house.

A Word about Biological, Chemical, or Nuclear Attacks

It is impossible to prepare for every eventuality. Many different chemical and biological agents have been discussed as weapons; nobody knows which one could be used. But no matter what may come your way, the best plan is to listen for local emergency instructions. Sheltering indoors is likely to be the best protection for you and your pets.

If there is a biological, chemical, or nuclear attack in your area, both you and your pets might need to be decontaminated. Listen to your local authorities for information about what to do.

This situation is new for most of us, and we are all learning. If you or someone close to you is inclined to take a fatalistic approach—as if there is nothing you can do to prepare—tell them that even a small amount of preparedness could prevent illness or injury.

If we are lucky, this will all be considered a training exercise, and you will have a good basis of emergency preparedness for hurricane season, the next blizzard, or whatever nature has in store for us.

Your Emergency Kit

Include these items in your home and office emergency kit:

*Food, water, and medicines for three days

*Medical and veterinary records

*Extra cash

*Battery-operated radio and flashlight, with extra batteries

*ID attached to your pet

*Pet carrier and/or leash

*Clothing or blanket suitable to the season

*Container to carry everything